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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Tuesday, November 24, 1936.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "TURKEY QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS." Information from the Market Basket, by the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Homemakers, we've been advised many times that twenty million turkeys are coming to market this year! Not all at once, but from month to month. Of course, it's a record crop -- one-third larger than last year's, and a million more turkeys than we had in 1932 or 1933.

I've collected all the turkey queries that have come in lately, and here are all the answers! So let's "talk turkey" immediately.

The first question is: "When does the turkey season actually begin? Isn't turkey at its best just at Thanksgiving and Christmas?"

Certainly it is. But turkey is never out of season nowadays. You can get extra fine turkeys in the late fall because custom and the holiday demand have led growers to plan their hatching and finishing off so as to have plenty of Thanksgiving and Christmas birds. But, knowing that people want turkeys more and more at other times, the growers now send a certain number to market every month, and these will be fine birds, too. Turkey raising has become a major branch of the poultry industry.

I have another question here about the turkey business. "Where are most of our turkeys grown at present?"

The Middle West raises about 60 percent of them, according to the Market Basket. California sends a good many to eastern markets, and in New England there has been a swing back to turkey raising lately. Science has stepped in to help the producer overcome some of the hazards. Turkeys catch cold, you know, like humans, and have numerous other ailments.

Question number 3 is about government graded turkeys. This housewife complains that she has heard of U.S. graded turkeys but has never seen one. "Where can I buy them?" she asks.

Well, I'm sorry I can't answer that, but I do know that Federal inspectors will grade about a million turkeys this year, and that some dealers have found government grades a good selling point. Turkeys of U.S. Grade A, or "Prime", and U.S. Grade B, or "Choice", are both good to buy. Very likely you won't be able to see much difference in these two grades, for prime and choice turkeys are both plump and well-finished. As a rule the grades are stamped on the box or barrel, not on the individual turkey. That's probably why this woman who wrote us has never seen a graded turkey.

Question 4. "How large a turkey should I buy? Should it be lightweight or heavy?" This must be from a new housekeeper, buying her first bird.

How large a turkey? Well, that depends somewhat on how many persons she wants to serve. In general you need to allow from half to three-fourths of a pound per person, figured on the weight of the turkey as you buy it from the dealer. A nine or ten pound turkey should serve 7 to 9 persons generously, with some left over, maybe.

Now, as to choosing a young or old turkey,- again, it all depends. The larger the bird, the better the proportion of meat to bone. A turkey with a short, blocky frame is apt to be more economical than a long, rangy type of bird. The younger the turkey, the more tender it will be if it is well fattened. A "young hen" or a "young tom" is less than a year old. The older, very heavy birds take a long time to cook, but they can be made delicious by slow cooking at moderate heat.

Question 5. "How can I tell good quality in a turkey?" That's a very practical question, and here's a poultry expert's answer.

"In a young turkey, look for a flexible breat bone, plump breast, thighs and back, good covering of fat over the entire frame, good dressing, few or no pin feathers, very slight flesh or skin bruises or discolorations. The turkey should be dry-picked or what is called semi-scalded, and should be packed dry. Sometimes you may see a turkey with a crooked breast bone. That's rather awkward to carve, but it won't affect the eating quality. Neither will a broken wing or leg, though such defects lower the market grade."

And now we come to what every woman wants to know. "How should the turkey be cooked?"

The latest word from the Bureau of Home Economics is "Use a moderate temperature (about 350 degrees Fahrenheit) all the time the turkey is in the oven. At this moderate temperature, a well-fattened young turkey takes about 15 minutes to the pound as bought, and an older bird 18 to 20 minutes to the pound.

Whether or not touse a cover on the roaster depends on the age and the plumpness of the turkey. If the bird is young and plump with streaks of fat along the back and breast, some cooks say to leave the cover off. Start the turkey breast down on a rack in the open pan. Baste it with melted butter and pan drippings about every half hour. The moderate oven heat, not the cover on the pan is what helps to hold in the juice in the meat. Intense heat and moisture, even the steam circulating in a covered roaster, will draw out the juice and make the meat dry.

An older or a not-so-fat bird needs a cover for part, if not all of the roasting time. It needs the help of steam to soften the tough muscles of legs and thighs. There is moisture enough in the turkey itself to make this steam. Don't baste the bird with water, or pour water in the bottom of the pan, unless you want to pot-roast your turkey. The pan drippings will brown just right for gravy. They won't burn if you keep the oven heat moderate.

Lastly, what about stuffing? Some of my listeners favor dry stuffing, others moist. My own preference is for a crumbly stuffing of bread crumbs, enriched with melted butter and rendered out turkey fat, and seasoned with savory herbs. Others like a stuffing moisted with milk, eggs, or oysters. Then there are the stuffings of cornbread, rice, or mashed potato mixed with nuts and seasonings. A medium sized turkey will take about 3 quarts of stuffing, if the crop as well as the body cavity is stuffed.

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